

May 28, 1954

Dr. Joshua Lederberg
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College of Agriculture
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Madison 6, Wisconsin

Dear Joshua:

Thank you very much for your letter of May 20 with the relative comments on the Buchner. I have also had some pertinent information from Dr. Steinhaus. So I will be able shortly to make a decision, and I will then let the two of you know what that decision is.

As for the Genetics of Micro-organisms by Tracy Sonneborn and yourself, let me set your mind at rest. This is my understanding of the situation:

There is a great need in this field, comment after comment urging us to satisfy the need. People whose comments are reported to us almost invariably say that only Tracy Sonneborn or Joshua Lederberg can do for this subject what needs to be done. Therefore, we have for some years encouraged you to join efforts. Finally, we have tried consistently to walk that narrow line between overly-insistent importunities, with their attendant high pressure on authors to sign a contract, and that foggy and indefinite attitude that implies, "Oh, write us a book that we can add to our list"; that is to say, we want to publish a Genetics of Micro-organisms by Tracy Sonneborn and Joshua Lederberg as much as we want to publish anything else, and want you to know it, being perfectly willing to seal the bargain with a contract when you two want it, but unwilling to high-pressure you.

You two have never made any hard and fast commitments either to do this book or to do it for us. You both seem to feel that it needs doing, and you both seem to want to do it. In addition, we have felt--and I hope not too optimistically--that each of you has understood what we as publishers are trying to do editorially and creatively, and has approved. I should also add that we have felt that, were you to write this book, you would want us to publish it. But we have gathered this more from your actions than from any hard and fast verbal commitment on your part.

As a matter of fact, I am glad you gave me the opportunity to sum up our thoughts regarding the Genetics of Micro-organisms and write you as above.

Sincerely yours,

WHF:mc
cc: Dr. Sonneborn

